

Five Model Self-Help Centers

The CFCC supervises the implementation of five pilot self-help centers which will provide models for replication in other counties in addition to translated materials and technological solutions.

Regional Model: Superior Court of California, County of Butte

Goals of the model: This is a regional program that is intended to serve at least two smaller counties. This model explores how counties that may not be able to afford a full-time attorney at a self-help center can share resources effectively with other counties. What agreements are necessary? What special challenges exist, and what can be done to overcome them?

Butte County's program: The Superior Court of Butte County is partnering with the courts in Glenn and Tehama Counties to provide assistance to self-represented litigants in the areas of small claims, unlawful detainer, eviction, fair housing, employment, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), enforcement of judgments, guardianships, name changes, family law issues not addressed by the family law facilitator, bankruptcy, probate, general civil procedures, tax law, tenant housing, and senior law issues. An attorney coordinator conducts workshops and clinics through the use of real-time videoconferencing, enabling self-represented litigants in these three counties to receive assistance simultaneously. Information on the project is available at: http://www.buttecourt.ca.gov/self_help/default.htm.

Urban Collaboration Model: Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles

Goals of the model: This is a program intended to coordinate self-help centers in a large jurisdiction. In some jurisdictions a number of self-help centers operate in or near the court, often with limited communication or sharing of resources. This is likely to lead to duplication of efforts and confusion for litigants. The urban collaboration model seeks to coordinate resources and provide a more seamless service delivery system for litigants.

Los Angeles County's program: The Superior Court of Los Angeles County's program creates a centralized Self-Help Management Center that will develop partnerships with the court, the local bar, local schools, and local social service organizations; coordinate self-help activities on a countywide basis; and standardize self-help intake procedures and protocols throughout the county. Services rendered by the center include the provision of informational materials about the court and its proceedings and procedures; instructions on how to complete forms; and the provision of reference materials about legal service providers, social service agencies, and government agencies, as well as other educational material. In coordination with existing self-help centers, the project is developing workshops and materials that can be offered throughout the county.

Technology Model: Superior Court of California, County of Contra Costa

Goals of the model: This is a program intended to emphasize the use of technology in providing services. As the number of self-represented litigants increases, technological solutions are being explored for completion of forms, provision of information, meeting with litigants at a distance, and other needed services. This model will utilize and evaluate the effectiveness of at least two methods of technology to provide services.

Contra Costa County's program: The Superior Court of Contra Costa County will deliver expert information and assistance via a combination of the Internet, computer applications, and real-time videoconference workshops to create a Virtual Self-Help Law Center for self-represented litigants with dissolution, child custody and visitation, domestic violence, civil, and guardianship cases. Virtual Self-Help Law Center resources will help parties navigate the court process; complete, file, and serve court forms; be prepared to handle their court hearings; understand and comply with court orders; and conduct certain mediations at a distance. The Contra Costa website is found at: <http://www.cc-courthelp.org/>.

Spanish-Speaking Model: Superior Court of California, County of Fresno

Goals of the model: The large number of Spanish-speaking litigants in California presents special challenges for self-help programs. This model seeks to provide cost-effective and efficient services for a primarily Spanish-speaking population while exploring techniques for educating litigants about the legal issues and procedures in their cases.

Fresno County's program: The Spanish Self-Help Education and Information Center developed by the Superior Court of Fresno County serves self-represented litigants in the areas of guardianship, unlawful detainer, civil harassment, and family law. The center provides daily access to Spanish-language self-help instructions, established a volunteer interpreter bureau, provides a Spanish-speaking court examiner to review court documents, and sponsors clinics with rotating "how-to" lectures for the areas of law specified above. The Fresno website is found at: http://www.fresno.ca.gov/2810/SSHC/SSHC_esp.htm.

Multilingual Model: Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco

Goals of the model: California has a diverse population, with a large group of immigrants and litigants who speak many different languages and have significantly different experiences. This model seeks to provide self-help services to litigants who speak a wide variety of languages and to develop materials and techniques to address the needs of a multilingual, multicultural population.

San Francisco County's program: The Superior Court of San Francisco County's program establishes a Multilingual Court Access Service Project that assists self-represented litigants in family law, dependency mediation, probate, small claims, civil harassment, child support, and other general civil cases. The center creates formal partnerships with community-based organizations that provide services to ethnic

populations and those that address legal issues for self-represented litigants. A bilingual attorney works with clients to ensure adequate services for them within the court and will provide referrals to appropriate community and legal agencies. Additional services include the translation of court materials, the development of a multilingual computerized self-help directory, and recruitment and coordination of multilingual interpreters.

Information on the San Francisco program is found at:

http://sfgov.org/site/courts_page.asp?id=19649.

Research component of the Model Self-Help Centers

The primary goal of the model self-help center research is to measure the overall effectiveness of the centers in several arenas. The centers may address several or all of the following outcomes:

- *Increased understanding of, and compliance with, the terms of court orders*
- *Increased access to justice*
- *Increased likelihood of “just” outcomes in cases involving self-represented litigants*
- *Increased user satisfaction with the court process*
- *Increased efficiency and effectiveness of the court system*
- *Increased education for court users so that their expectations are reasonable in light of the law and facts*

Secondary goals of the research include developing a profile of center users and determining which services and delivery methods are most helpful/effective.